

Graphic Novels

A Teacher's Companion



DOUGHERTY 07

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TEACHING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

MINDS ON

What is a Graphic Novel?
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ACTION!

Reading Graphic Novels: The Pictures (and Words) I Read
Who's Involved in Making a Graphic Novel?
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CONSOLIDATION

Differentiating Instruction
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For Graphic Novels, A New Frontier: Teenage Girls
Sparkling Media Literacy with Comics



WHAT
DID YOU
EXPECT?

I WAS A *BOY*.

I DUG *ADVENTURE*...

I DUG *DANGER*...

I DUG *PERIL*...

I EVEN DUG
ROMANCE...

SO WHEN THEY TRIED TO
DISENTANGLE *QUASIMODO'S*
SKELETON FROM EMBRACING
ESMERALDA, AND IT
CRUMBLED INTO *DUST*,
I *CRIED*.

AND LATER, AFTER I
WAS FORCED TO FLEE
LONDON IN THE WAKE OF A
TERRIFYING MARTIAN
INVASION...

I *WEPT* AGAIN
TO BE REUNITED WITH
MY *WIFE*.

IT WAS MY INTRODUCTION
TO *STORY*.

IT WAS MY INTRODUCTION
TO *LITERATURE*.

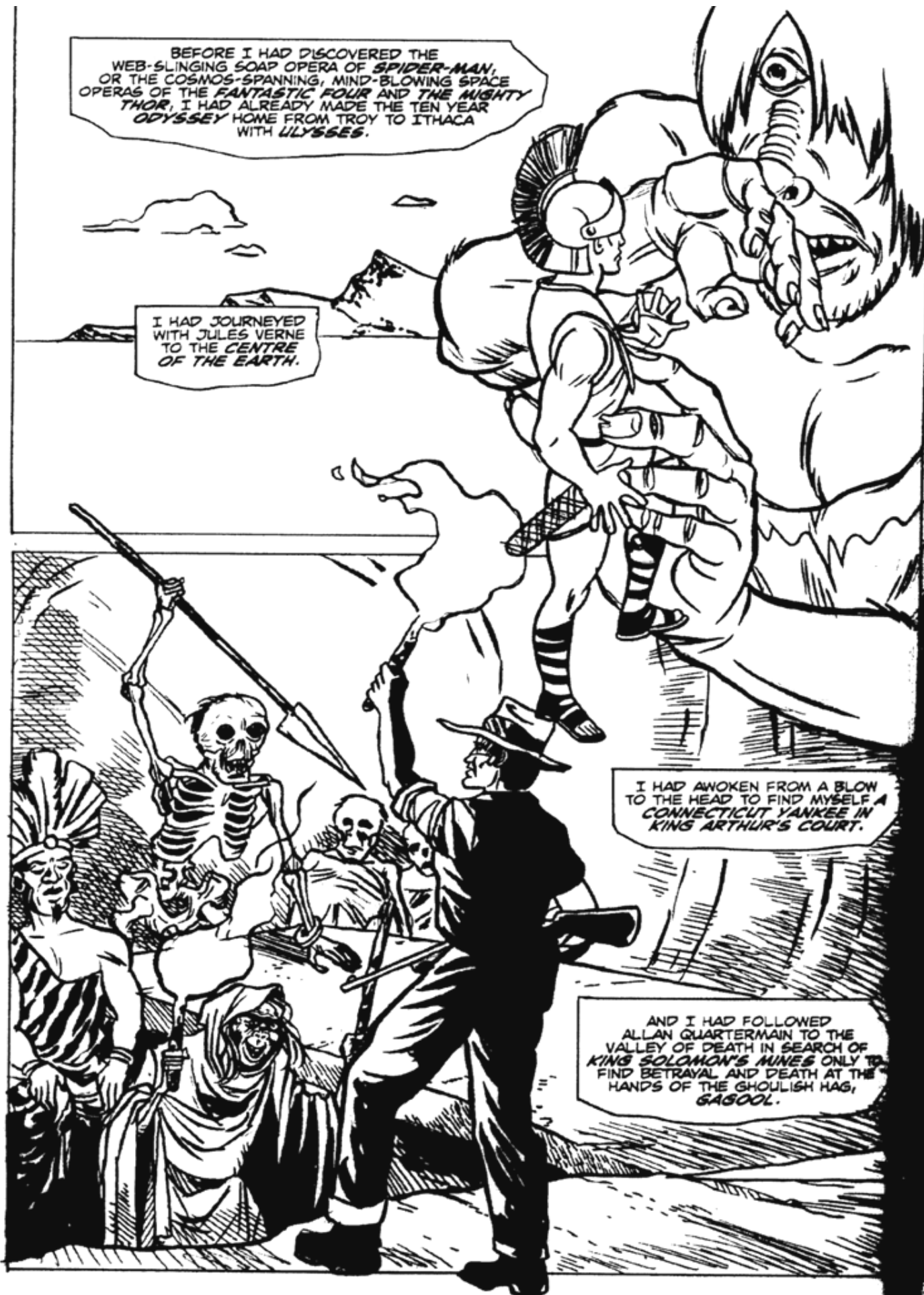
AND IT CAME FROM A *COMIC BOOK*.

BEFORE I HAD DISCOVERED THE
WEB-SLINGING SOAP OPERA OF *SPIDER-MAN*,
OR THE COSMOS-SPANNING, MIND-BLOWING SPACE
OPERAS OF THE *FANTASTIC FOUR* AND THE MIGHTY
THOR, I HAD ALREADY MADE THE TEN YEAR
ODYSSEY HOME FROM TROY TO ITHACA
WITH *ULYSSES*.

I HAD JOURNEYED
WITH JULES VERNE
TO THE CENTRE
OF THE EARTH.

I HAD AWOKEN FROM A BLOW
TO THE HEAD TO FIND MYSELF A
CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN
KING ARTHUR'S COURT.

AND I HAD FOLLOWED
ALLAN QUARTERMAIN TO THE
VALLEY OF DEATH IN SEARCH OF
KING SOLOMON'S MINES ONLY TO
FIND BETRAYAL AND DEATH AT THE
HANDS OF THE GHOULISH HAG,
GASOOL.



I BLAME MY *DAD*.

HE DIDN'T WANT ME
READING SUPER-HERO
COMICS BACK IN THE
1960'S.

AS IT TURNED OUT
THERE WAS MORE THAN
ENOUGH ROOM IN MY YOUNG HEAD
FOR BOTH *PETER PARKER*
AND *CAPTAIN AMERICA*.

IN *CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED*
I FOUND ALL THE ACTION,
ADVENTURE AND ROMANCE
A BOY COULD EVER WANT.

I ALSO FOUND A
LOVE OF *STORY* THAT'S
REMAINED WITH ME MY
ENTIRE LIFE AS SOME OF
MY FAVORITE COMIC BOOKS
BECAME SOME OF MY
FAVORITE NOVELS.

AND ALTHOUGH I EVENTUALLY
MEANDERED MY WAY INTO MARVEL'S
HOUSE OF IDEAS WHERE I GROOVED
TO THEIR SELF-PROCLAIMED
WORLD'S GREATEST COMICS...

IT WAS NOT BEFORE
COMICS HAD INTRODUCED ME
TO THE *WORLD'S GREATEST*
AUTHORS.

WITH ANY
LUCK--IN TIME--
MY DAUGHTER
WILL BLAME
ME TOO.

"*WORLD'S GREATEST*"

TEXT AND ART BY
ROS WALTON
WITH SPECIAL THANKS
TO *R. S. TAYLOR*



On Reading Graphic Novels

What the Research Tells Us:

- “Struggling adolescent readers need opportunities to choose their reading materials. This is critical for readers who may have had many years of failure and who may associate reading only with low-level information retrieval, dry writing exercises, assessment, or busywork” (Decker, 1996; Fischer, 1999).
- “the graphic novel offers teachers the opportunity to implement critical media literacy in the classroom—literacy that affirms diversity, gives voice to all, and helps students examine ideas and practices that promulgate inequity” (Schwarz, 2006).
- “Both traditional, alphabetic literacy and literacies such as information, visual, and media literacy can be well served by classroom engagement with the graphic novel.”
- “Comics provide authentic language-learning opportunities for all students, regardless of a learners’ second language proficiency level” (Carey, 2004).
- “Engaged students are more likely than nonengaged students to want to listen to, read, talk, and write about the content of the literature, whether oral or written. Comics contain whole stories [...] told with natural language, avoiding the stilted, artificial language of controlled vocabulary stories.”
- “Reading is such an important activity for all children, and using comic book-related lessons offers teachers an important new tool to draw students into the world of words, ... Comic books and graphic novels cannot replace other forms of literature, but they can be an entry point for some reluctant readers.” *Comics in the Classroom*, *Industry News, Scoop*, May 4, 2007.
- “Students remember what is meaningful, outstanding, or useful, as determined by their personal interests and purpose for reading. Graphic novels can help move a reluctant or an unmotivated student into feeling like a successful, interested reader.” (Boothe, Lundy. In *Graphic Detail*.)



Why Teach Graphic Novels?

"Comics have been around for more than a century, but it wasn't until the 1950s that they picked up a bad public image. They were blamed for bad grades, juvenile delinquency, drug use and criminal behavior in particular — as well as the moral degeneration of the nation's youth. They even became the subject of a Senate investigation. Yet, their appeal endured. Today, the short words, crisp dialogue and energetic plotline they present seem to fit a society crowded with videos and video games. With Beowulf, Superman, Macbeth and Captain Marvel adventuring together in the same medium, educators may find comic literature a valuable addition to their teaching techniques" (Cox, Vicki. *Technicolor Spaghetti*).

Graphic novels are not meant to replace other forms of literature; instead they can act as an access point for students who struggle with language (ESL and ELD students), reading skills (students with IEPs), and attention (ADD, ADHD, ASD), and engagement (LDC and ELS students).

Graphic novels can help these students—and others who might not fall into any set special needs category—with **vocabulary** (as illustrations accompany challenging terminology, along with it being 'chunked' and less dense), **setting** and **character development** (illustrations of places and characters allow students to more easily visualize, and therefore relate to them).

These texts offer **multiple points of entry** for students with different learning styles and preferences. Visual learners will find engagement through the images, auditory learners can be engaged by reading them aloud, kinesthetic learners will like handling the texts.

Students who are **reluctant readers** or a-literate readers (they can read but don't like to read) can also benefit when graphic novels are used in a classroom. Students, who become used to seeing themselves as failed readers with traditional texts, begin to see themselves as successful readers.

"Although comic books or cartoons are often considered subliterate and hardly appropriate for schools, these genres make an interesting bargain with young readers. According to read-aloud specialist Jim Trelease (2001), to become proficient readers people need to master a set of about 5,000 'rare words' that appear infrequently in conversation. In the average adult novel, these words appear 52 times per 1,000 words of text. In comic books, they appear 53 times per 1,000 (Hayes & Athens, 1988). Consequently, comic books don't reduce the vocabulary demand on young readers, but they do **provide picture support, quick and appealing story lines, and less text**. The comic book-like Captain Underpants series, wildly popular with reluctant boy readers, fits this pattern, not by over-simplifying vocabulary, but by drawing readers in with the visual story of a principal-turned-superhero in cape and briefs."

Educational Leadership September 2006 "Media and Literacy: What's Good?"



Educational Merits of Graphic novels

- help poor or unmotivated readers by engaging them to practice their reading skills
- benefit English Language Learners who can use the pictures to increase their understanding of vocabulary
- engage readers who learn visually, and who are comfortable with visual media such as video games and computer graphics
- develop vocabulary
- encourage readers to explore different genres
- teach positive messages such as helping others, being selfless, working to one's best ability, participating in teamwork, and perseverance
- help readers develop an appreciation for different literary and artistic style
- open a reader's mind to new ways of storytelling, and increase their imagination, through the unique combination of text and pictures to convey a story

Comics and Multiple Intelligences

An activity in which students create their own comic or graphic novel taps into Howard Gardner's "Multiple Intelligences."

Verbal/Linguistic: What are some of the things your character says or thinks? There is no limit to what words can do in a comic. On the other hand, some artists have made comics using almost nothing but words.

Visual/Spatial: Cartoon drawings are naturally visual. Placing the characters in sets and backgrounds encourages spatial learning.

Mathematical: Comics has a long history of formalism, which has always involved mathematical arrangements of panels.

Kinetic/Bodily: What is your character doing? Artists across the globe will attest to the physicality of drawing their characters. Students can make the faces their characters make, and get into their positions in order to draw them.

Interpersonal: Who are your character's friends? Collaborative games can lead to brainstorming.

Intrapersonal: What are your character's moods? What does he or she think? Comics have a rich history of exploring the Intrapersonal.

Naturalistic: Where is your character placed? Explore his or her natural surroundings.

Musical/Rhythmic: Comics tell stories in rhythmic ways. Repetition of panels, and innovative and abstract stories are fostered in comics.

Concerns Around Teaching

A Limited Audience?

“One of the great things about using comics in media literacy is that they can be adapted to virtually any grade level as long as one shifts the content for age appropriateness and interest level: the clarity with which this medium can illustrate the core concepts of media literacy remains [...]

“Kathleen Monnin, Assistant Professor of Literacy at the University of North Florida, likes to point to the central role of comics by invoking today’s all-important goal of **“image literacy.”** “We find ourselves living during the greatest communication revolution in history, where image-dominant literacies of screen, animation, technology, video game, and picture are starting to share the stage with the traditional print-text literacies.” Comics, then, represent a key entry point for K-12 into this “multi-modal literacy world.” And while “visual literacy” (and sometimes **“critical literacy”**) has long been an element in basal reading and lit programs, rarely are the resources provided as rich and engaging as those in the graphic formats.” (Gutierrez, Peter. *“Sparking Media Literacy With Graphic Novels”*)

What about the depictions of violence?

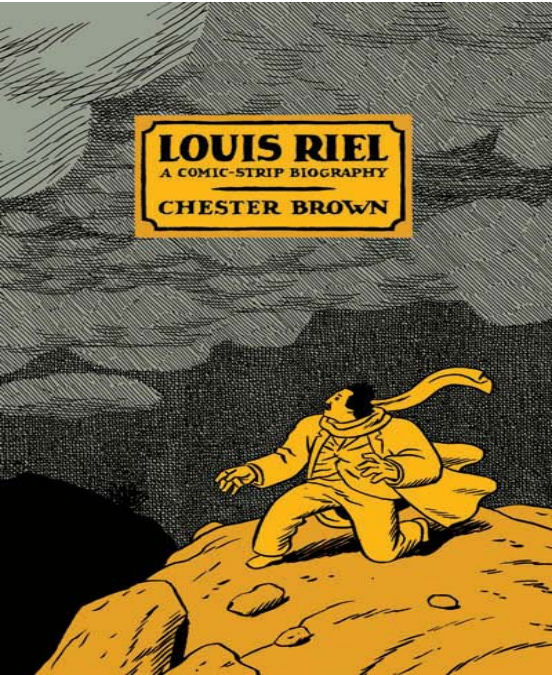
As with any text that contains coarse language, violent acts, or disturbing scenes, teachers take great care in addressing and contextualizing such sensitive issues with their students. While it may be the graphic depiction of these scenes in comics that some teachers find inappropriate, these are still important points of discussion, even more so as students are confronted with graphic images of violence and sexuality in various media forms.

“Violence in the media—and its effect on us—should be a topic of discussion. For me, the most interesting sections of the student interviews dealt with their theories about media violence. What is its effect upon them? What are appropriate limits? What limits would they set for their own kids? What is its role on fostering violence in our culture? What makes someone susceptible to media violence? When is violence necessary in a story? When is it too much? Why do we “enjoy” violence? Why do we “enjoy” being scared? When does a movie become “too scary?”” (Newkirk, Thomas. Misreading Masculinity)

“Writing that causes teachers or classmates to feel threatened or belittled is inappropriate. There is a distinction between writing that has a violent effect (fear of being harmed, severe embarrassment, being mocked because of racial/ethnic identity or physical appearance)—and writing that employs violence (battles, shooting, missiles) without having a negative effect on others in the class.” (Newkirk, Thomas. Misreading Masculinity)

Not Just for English Classes: Cross-Curricular Applications

Graphic novels are also available that support most subject-area curricular expectations.



MATH AND MUSIC PART I

HEY OCTA, SOMEONE TOLD ME THAT THERE IS SOME MATH IN THE MUSICAL SCALE. IS THAT RIGHT?

YOU BETCHA. IT'S ALL DONE WITH RATIOS AND FRACTIONS.

WELL, THE LAST TWO WEEKS I'VE LEARNED ABOUT FRACTIONS, BUT WHAT'S A RATIO?

WELL A RATIO IS TWO OR MORE NUMBERS SEPARATED BY A COLON LIKE 5:4 OR 2:3:7, AND THEY TELL YOU HOW MUCH EACH SIDE IS WORTH. LIKE FRACTIONS, YOU CAN MULTIPLY OR DIVIDE EACH SIDE BY THE SAME THING AND YOU GET AN EQUAL RATIO.

OH, SO 5:4 IS THE SAME AS 10:8 BECAUSE I'VE MULTIPLIED BOTH SIDES BY 2.

AND WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH THE MUSICAL SCALE?

WELL, IF I HAVE A PAIR OF NOTES WITH ONE FREQUENCY TWICE THE OTHER, A RATIO OF 1:2, THEN THE NOTES BLEND TOGETHER PERFECTLY IN OUR EARS. WE CALL THIS AN OCTAVE.

IF WE TAKE THREE NOTES IN THE RATIOS OF 4:5:6, THE HARMONY IS PARTICULARLY GOOD.

WE CALL THAT A MAJOR TRIAD. HERE, LOOK AT THESE ON THE KEYBOARD TO THE RIGHT.

TOMORROW, WE FILL IN THE REST OF THE C MAJOR SCALE, AND WEDNESDAY WE LOOK AT THE BLACK NOTES AND THEIR RATIOS.

The C Major Scale and Their Ratios

C	D	E	F	G	A	B	C
4	5	6		8			

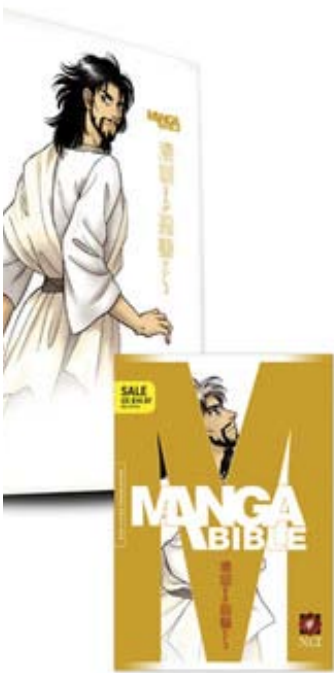
Major Triad

Octave

The Octave has frequencies in a ratio of 1 : 2, or, in this case, 4 : 8 (multiply both sides of 1 : 2 by 4 and you get an equivalent ratio)

The major triad has a ratio of 4 : 5 : 6. Shown in the diagram is the C major triad, C - E - G

When these notes, C and the next C, or the triad of C - E - F are played on the piano, they make a pleasant harmony.



BECAUSE GENES ARE CALLED ON TO EXPRESS--TO BECOME ACTIVE--ONLY IN CERTAIN CELLS AT CERTAIN TIMES, THEY ARE SWITCHED ON OR OFF AS THEY ARE NEEDED.

GENE ON

GENE OFF

IN MOST CELLS, THE DEFAULT SETTING IS "OFF" WHY? BECAUSE THE UNRESTRICTED GROWTH OF A PARTICULAR PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTIC CAN BE BAD.

NO FIDDLING...

CANCER IS THE RESULT OF AN UNCONTROLLED GENE EXPRESSION.

IN THE EARLY STAGES OF AN ORGANISM'S DEVELOPMENT, MOST GENES BECOME TISSUE SPECIFIC. THAT MEANS THAT A SPECIFIC CELL'S DNA PERMANENTLY TURNS OFF ALL ITS GENES THAT DO NOT CODE FOR PHYSICAL TRAITS SPECIFICALLY NEEDED FOR THAT CELL.

BUT BEFORE THAT, ALL CELLS ARE TOTIPOTENT--WE CAN BECOME ANY TISSUE NEEDED!

BUT WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT ACTIVATE A CELL'S "TISSUE APPROPRIATE" GENES WHEN THEY ARE NEEDED?

WE'VE GOT INCOMING!

THERE ARE SEVERAL, SUCH AS...

Comics, Graphic Novels and Girls

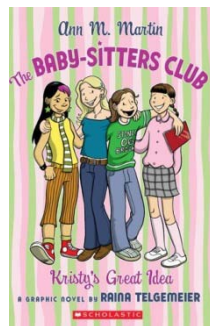
"the issue of 'popular culture'—and its appropriateness in schools—also affects valuations of girls' literacy. Girls will write about sports, and while they claim that boys are more 'violent' writers, they are also attracted to horror fiction, in which violence, or its possibility, is an indispensable element. They are also a receptive audience to boys' action stores if they are done in an interesting way" (Newkirk, Thomas. Misreading Masculinity: Boys, Literacy, and Popular Culture).

Do Teenage Girls read Comics and Graphic Novels?

<http://connectwithyourteens.blogspot.com/2009/02/do-teenage-girls-read-comics-and.html>)

When you hear the words comic books, do you get a picture of a geeky teenage boy reading about superheroes? If so, you'll be surprised to learn that not only do boys read many other type of comics and graphic novels, but many comics are being written for teenage girls. (Graphic novels are comics books bound together to form a book.

Teenage girls are reading many different types of comic books, including those read by males. Both The Umbrella Academy and Buffy the Vampire Slayer, both action fantasy comics, have had large female followings. The hugely successful Sandman comic series by Neil Gaiman was read by just as many females as males. Same for the Scott Pilgrim comics which is being adapted into a film starring Michael Cera.



Successful comic series for teen girls include Emily the Strange and Lenore. For younger teens and tween girls, Little Lulu and the Sardine in Outer Space series are very popular.

Due to the popularity of comics with this demographic, classic tween girl characters are now being remade as comics. You can now read The Baby-sitters Club Graphic Novels and Nancy Drew Graphic Novels.

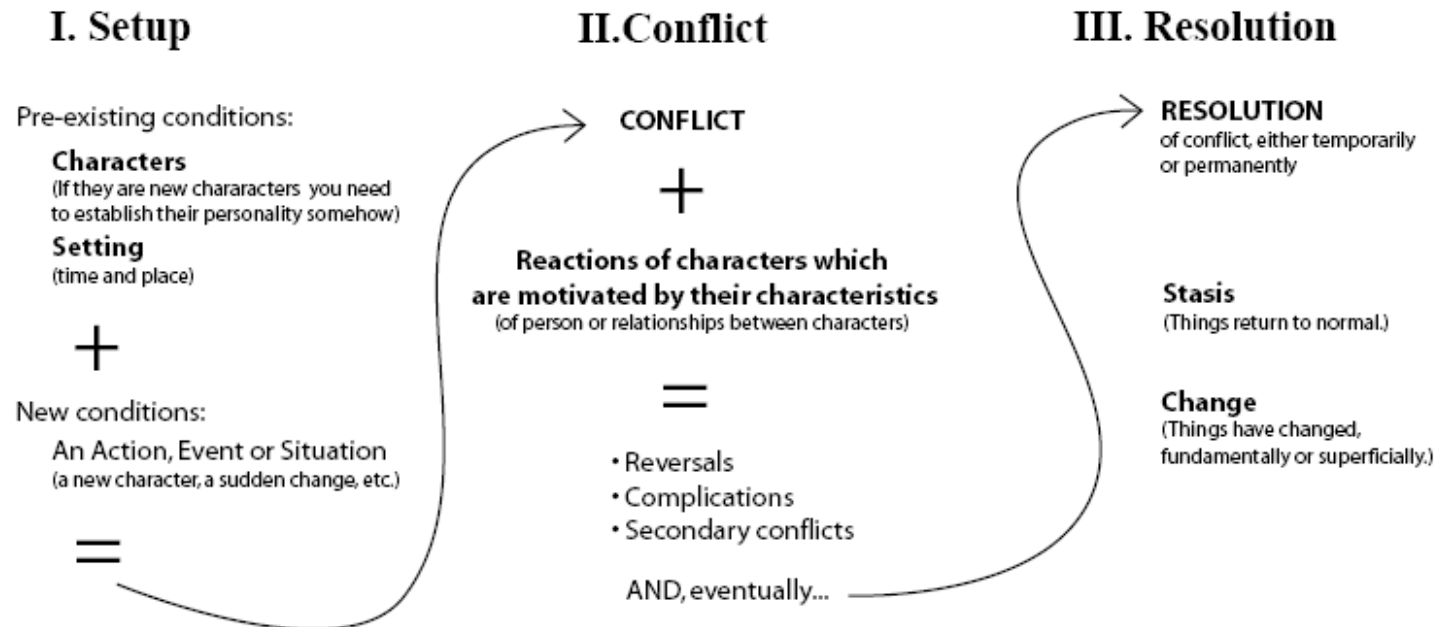
Looking for more comics for teenage girls? Go to the comix channel of the gURL website. It is an online library of over 150 web comics created by award winning artists.

Resources:

<http://www.thedragonweb.com/womenincomics.html>

<http://friendsoflulu.wordpress.com/>

THREE-ACT STORY STRUCTURE



Of course, this is not all that happens in a good story, whether it's comics or something else. Soon we will also be talking about: digressions, observations, flashbacks, mood pieces, slices of life, themes & leitmotifs, and other things that happen in and around the story itself.

Catholic Connections

The Catholic Graduate Expectation section 2e states a student “Uses and integrates the Catholic faith tradition, in the critical analysis of the arts, media, technology and information systems to enhance the quality of life.”

As stated above, comic books and graphic novels deal with issues and situations ripe for discussion, allowing students to see themselves in the heroic figures pictured. The following Pattern is evident in many traditional and graphic novels.

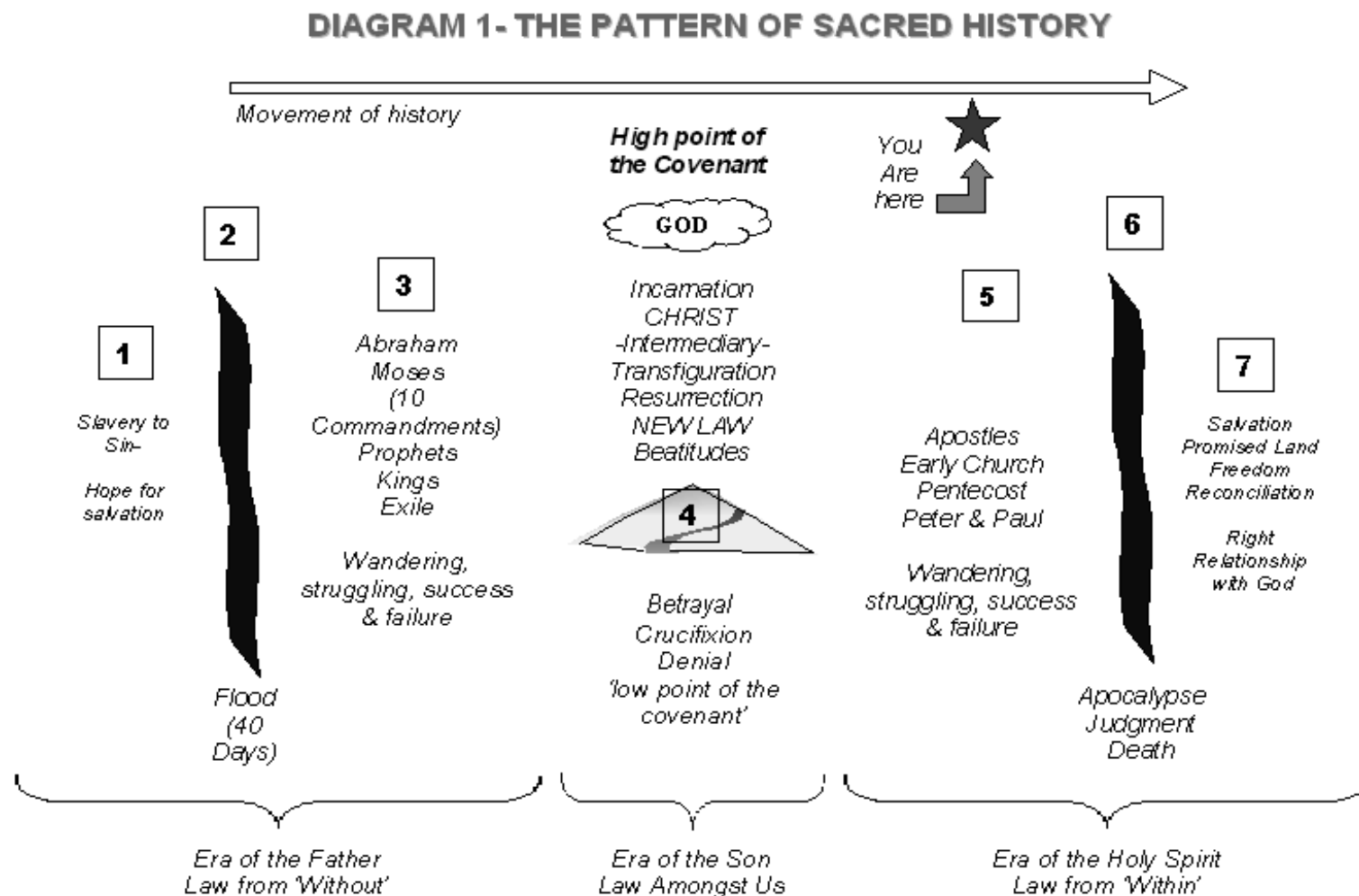


DIAGRAM 2: THE EXODUS PATTERN

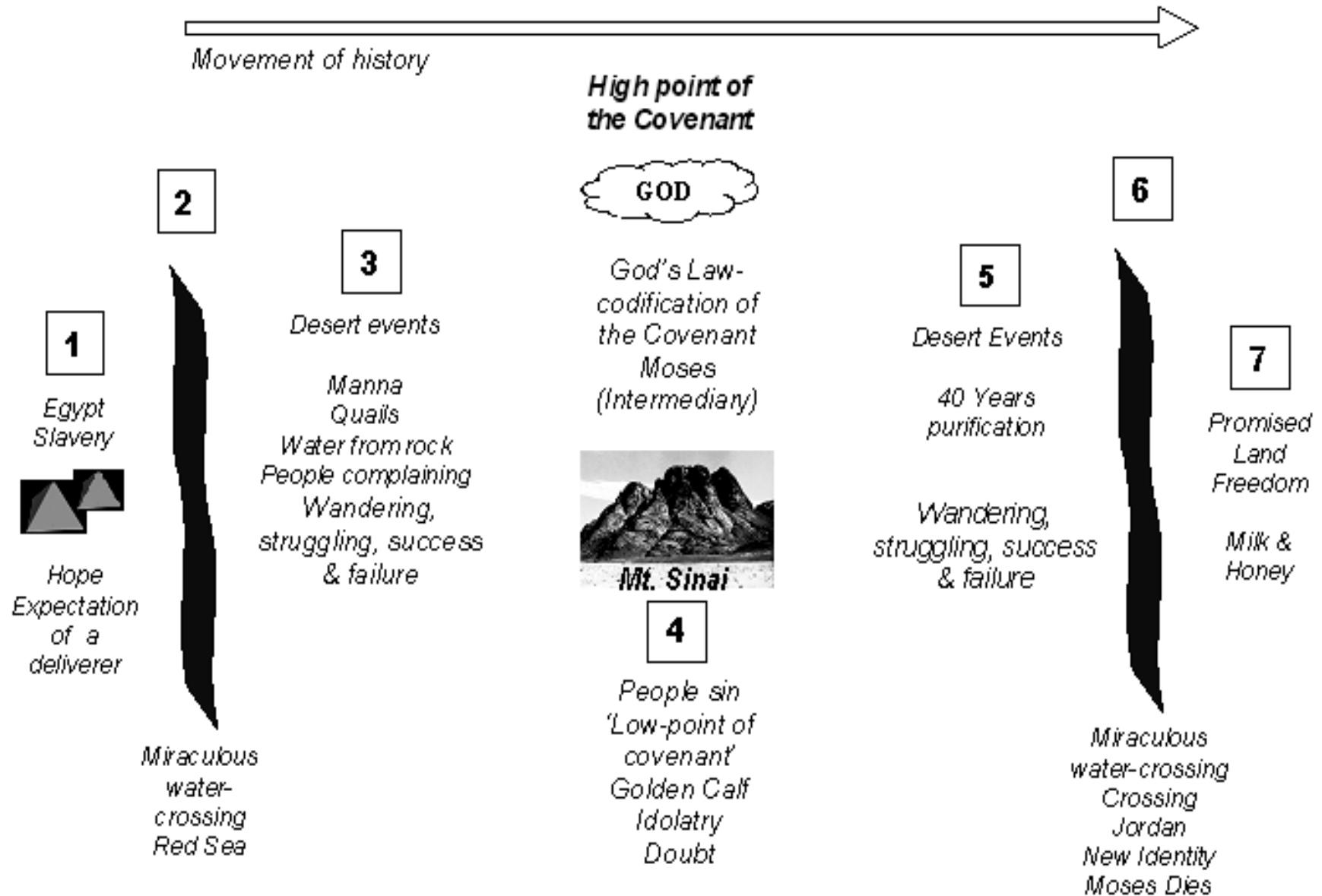


DIAGRAM #3: JESUS AND THE PATTERN OF SACRED HISTORY

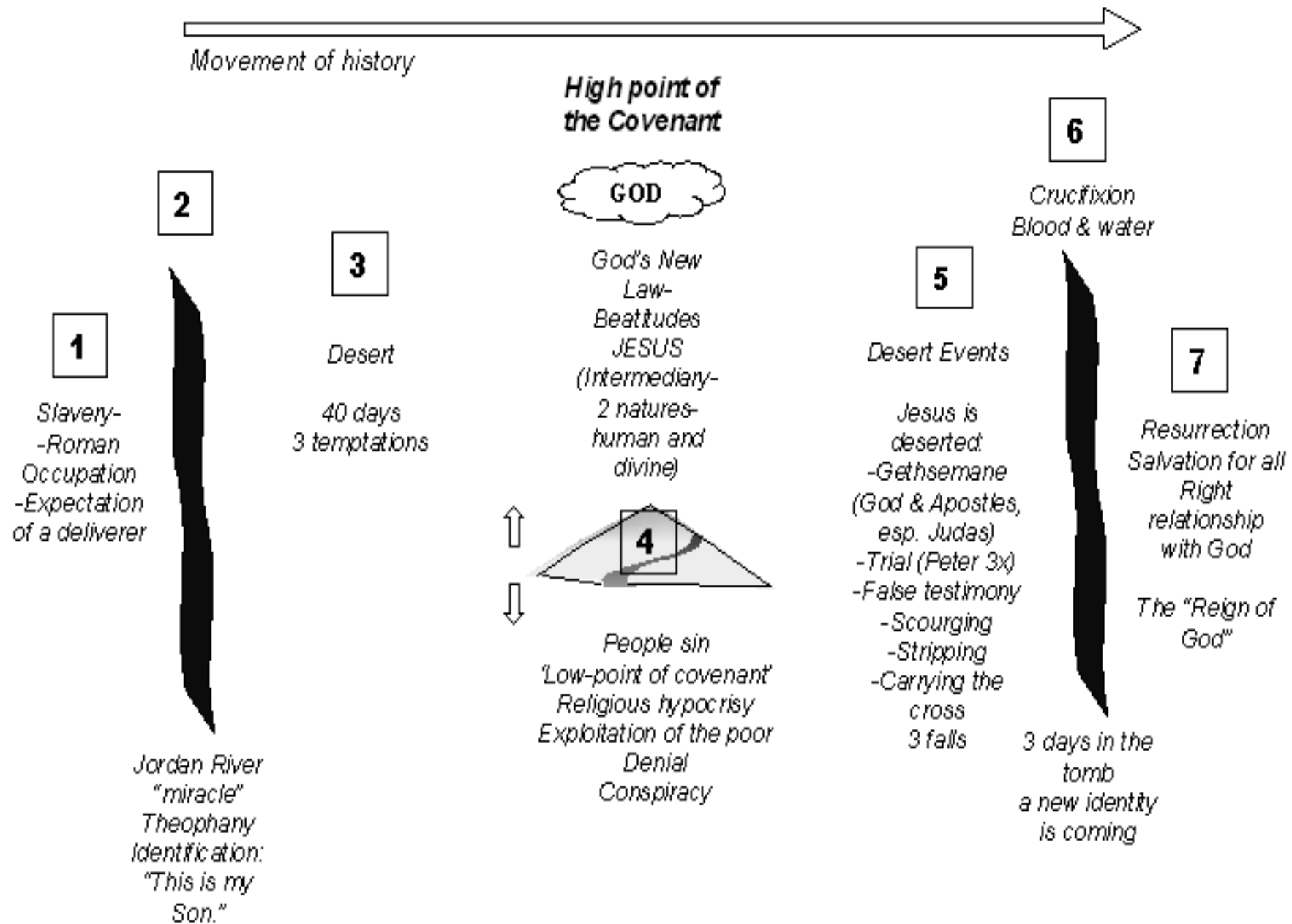
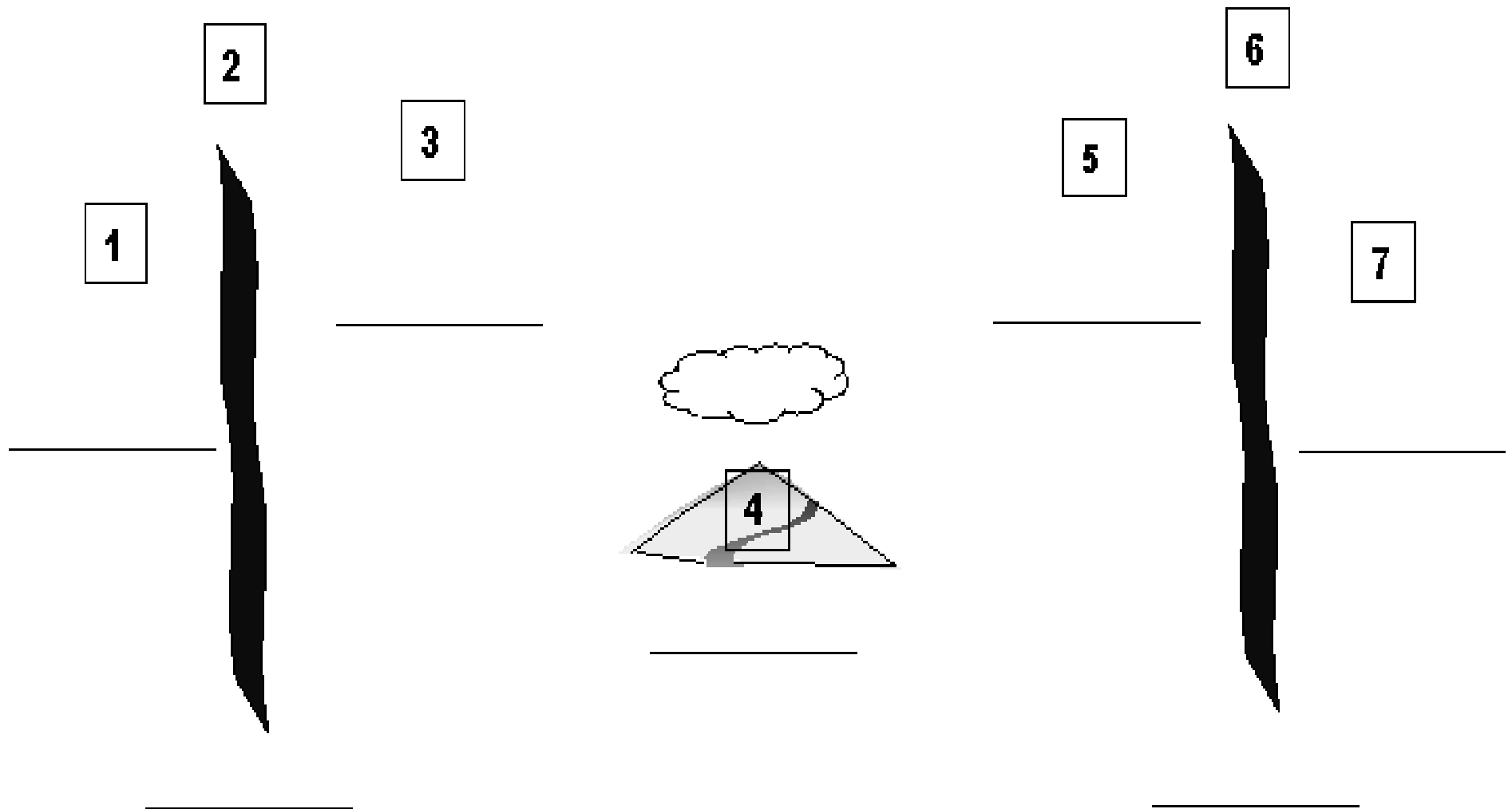


DIAGRAM #4: THE SACRED PATTERN IN OUR TEXT



Q. What is a "graphic novel"?

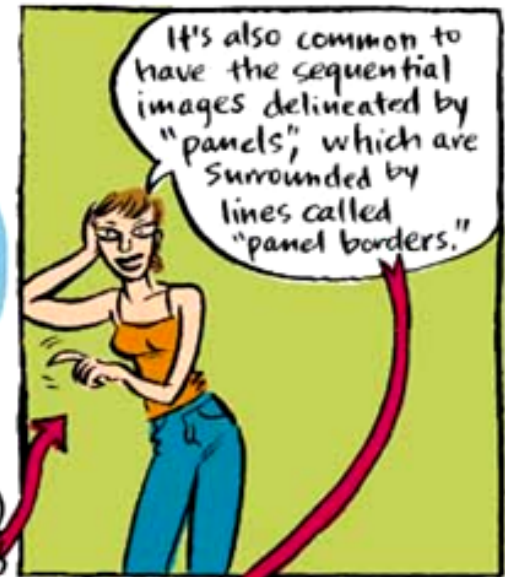
A. Graphic novels have a few defining characteristics. But first and most importantly, they are long comic books. (I'll get back to the rest.)

Q. What is a "comic book"?

A. You may think you know the answer to this one, but stick with me a few minutes:
A comic book is a magazine or bound book that contains "comics" (also known as "comix"). Comics is a medium for expressing information and/or artistic ideas that is defined by



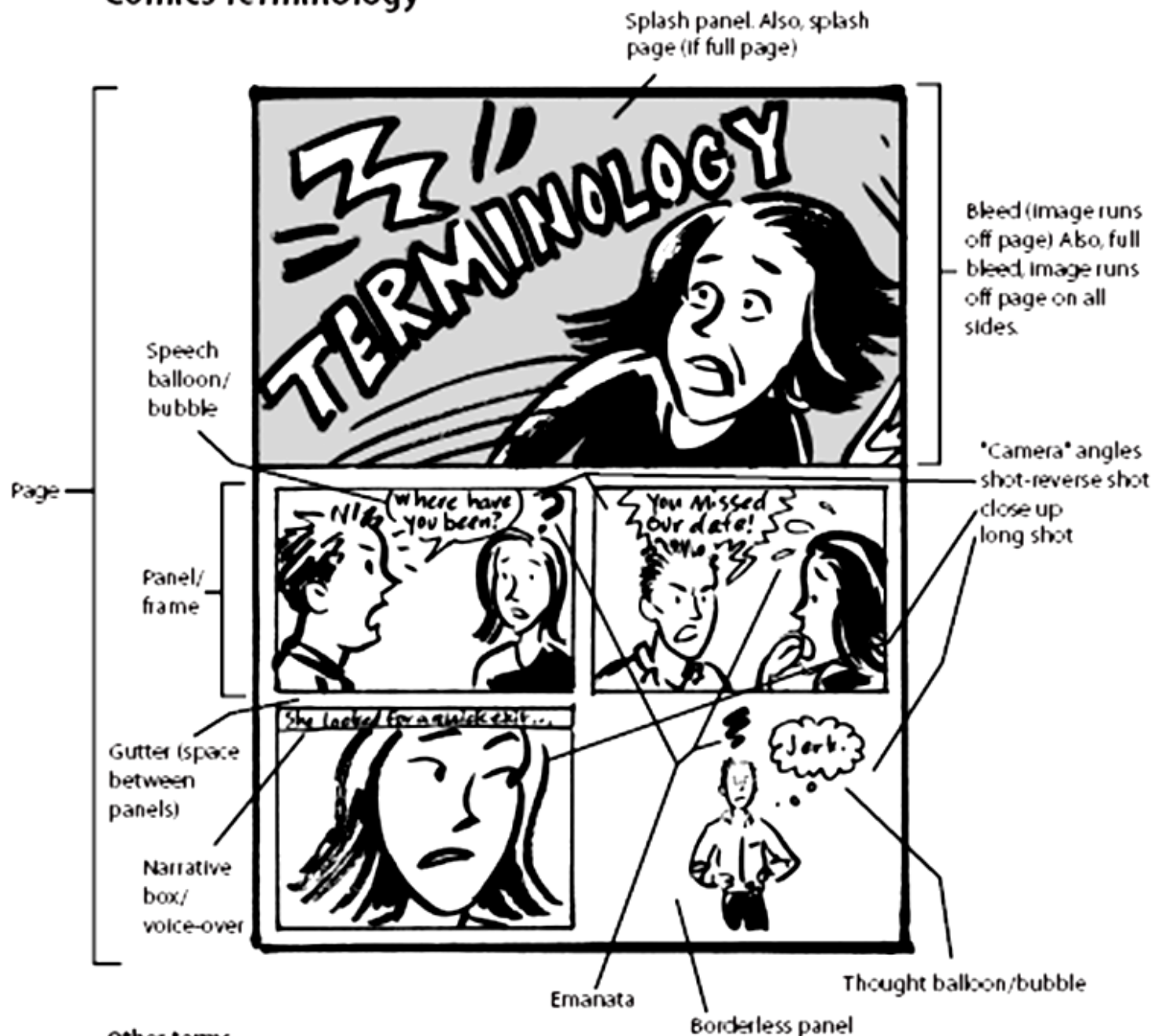
... and that's it. However, comics also often feature such things as



These techniques aren't necessary to make comics, but they are quite common. There are other common, familiar, but even more optional elements of many comics, such as certain kinds of characters, like funny animals or licensed characters. But I'll get to that in a minute.



Comics Terminology



Other terms

Spread: two facing pages in a printed book

Recto/verso: technical terms for pages in a spread. Recto = right page, verso = left page

Printer's spread: the layout of pages for printing. Not the same as a spread in a printed book.

Thumbnail: a rough sketch of a comic, delineating placement of figures, word balloons, and background elements, as well as content of word balloons.

Pencil: a relatively defined drawing preliminary to the final inked stage.

Inks: the final stage of a comics drawing (applying ink to the pencil guidelines)

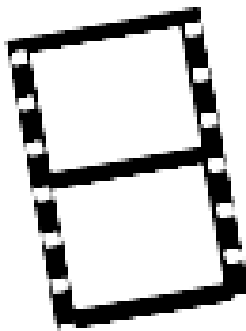
Mockup: a rough layout of pages to plan a book

Paste-up: the final artwork pages ready for printing

Indicia: important copyright and other legal information printed in a book, usually at the beginning.

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See <http://www.teachingcomics.org/copy.php> for complete copyright information.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS:



No matter how many panels you have on a page, each panel has a story to tell or a punch line to deliver. Together they should work to show the reader what the whole story is all about.

Think of your story as a film strip with many frames. You need to take only one frame from that sequence that best illustrates that part of the sequence, and that usually means right in the middle of the action each time. You can try doing one panel strips like in the newspaper to get the hang of making your panel deliver a point. Then try a one page story of 4 panels and try to get the pictures to tell the story in order.

Panels can be set up in grid form of the same shape & size in each panel or in free form where the size and shape vary. Each page set-up gives a different way of reading the page. In grid the panels tell you to read one after the other in order. In free form the panels themselves can help say something by varying the size of the panel to display importance. They can also make something feel small or gigantic, squeezed and free. And the very border you use on the panel can be used for effect.

What effect does each panel set up below create?

FIGURE 1

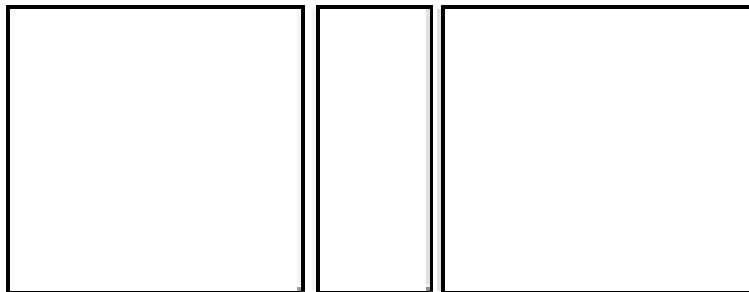


FIGURE 2

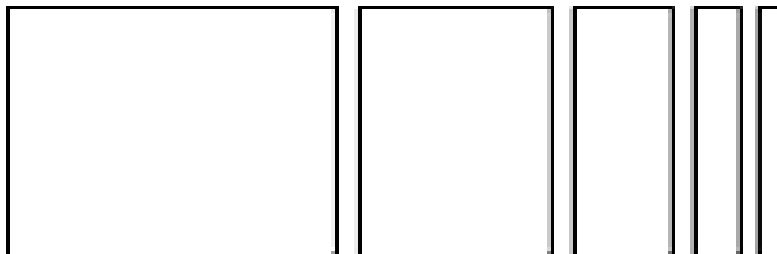
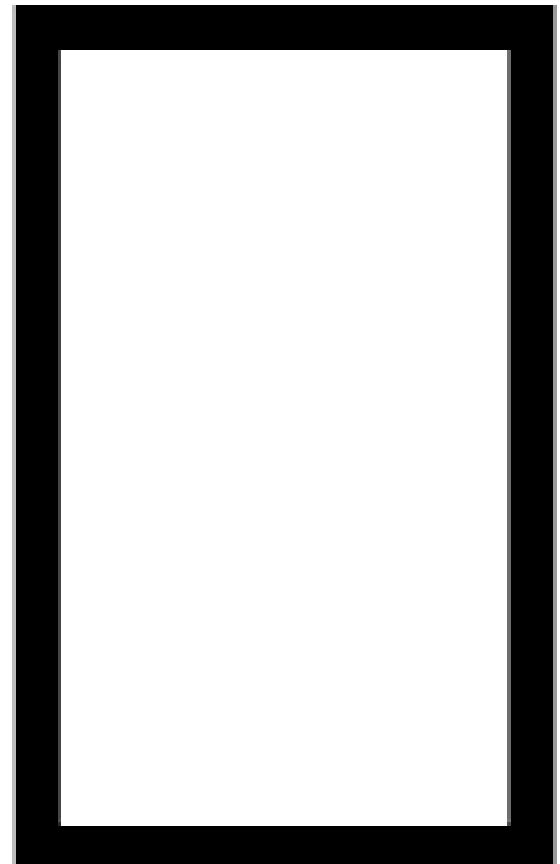


FIGURE 3



FIGURE 4



JOB DESCRIPTIONS : Penciller, Inker, Colorist, and Letterer

Artist/Penciller/Illustrator

Job Description: It is the penciller's job to take a script and give it form. Sometimes the script lays out exactly how things should look. At other times, there is only a basic suggestion as to what should actually be there. In any respect, it is the penciller's job to take those words and give them life in a way that makes sense, moves the story along, and with a consistent quality.

Skills Needed: A successful penciller needs:

- *Artistic Know How* – A comic book artist needs to know how to draw! Study great artists like [Kirby](#), [Lee](#), and [Cassaday](#). Practice every day, studying human anatomy and architecture. Take classes or buy a book. Get out there and draw!
- *Create What Your Mind Sees* – An artist needs to be able to envision something, then put it down on paper. Sometimes it isn't as easy as that, but you need to be able to create pictures from a description or picture in your mind.
- *Flexibility* – Things change all the time. Sometimes you have to roll with the punches and change things midstream. This may be different if you are the sole creator or are self publishing, but in the world of a freelance artist, you need to be able to change things for your clients.
- *Professional Behavior* – Being able to turn out work when you say it will be done will go a long way to getting jobs in the future.
- *Collaborative Mindset* – Creating a comic book is a collaborative effort between writer, artist, editor, and the rest of the team. Be willing to hear ideas and modify them to the overall vision of the project. Stand your ground though, if your values are in question.
- *Consistency* – You need to be consistent as an artist. If a character changes the way they look throughout the comic, and it isn't intentional, your reader will be confused. Things need to look right and make sense. Developing a consistent style (hopefully a good one) will go a long way in making you a better artist.

Inker

Job Description: The Inker takes an artists' pencils and goes over them in ink, taking the image and turning it into a finished piece of work. The dark ink's lines makes the art jump off the page as well as helping to add depth and dimension. At one time, inking was mostly used to prepare the comic page for printing, as the printer would pick up the light pencils, but today, the inker is a vital part of the comic creation process.

Skills Needed:

- *Artistic Skills:* – One of the misconceptions about inkers is that they are glorified tracers. This simply isn't true. An inker needs to be an accomplished artist in their own right. They need to know about anatomy and architecture, scale and perspective, just as much as a penciller does. The reason for this is that the inker takes the artists pencils and makes a new piece of art out of it. Some pencillers will even do very rough sketches so the inker can then go over and embellish them later.
- *Strong Sense Of Light:* – The inker works with two colors, black and white. It is very important that the inker understands how light is represented so as to add that to the pencils. This will help give it the three dimensional appearance it needs.
- *Speed:* – An inker typically doesn't have as much time to work as the penciller does. A good inker will need be able to work fast, but keep up the consistent work. *Flexibility:* – A comic book inker needs to be flexible in many ways. They never know when a job might come up, so they need a flexible schedule. Since they are working with a pencillers work, they may need to take feedback from the penciller or writer about what things should look like.

Colorist

Job Description: Simply put, the colorist's job is to apply color to a comic book. This is easier than it seems though. Typically, the job is broken up into two parts, flatting and coloring. In the flatting process, the basic areas of color are blocked out so the colorist knows what spaces to color what. In the coloring stage, the colorist applies not only the color, but adds lighting and shading to help give the three dimensional feel that comic books are known for. The colorist helps the comic book to become a finished piece of art, and is an artist in their own right, needing very different kinds of skills than the penciller and inker need.

Skills Needed:

- *Knowledge Of Color* – The colorist needs to know how to use color. School training is helpful, but not necessary as many colorists learn as they go. You need to know what color looks like and how it changes under light and shadow.
- *Artistic Mindset* – A colorist is an artist, no question about it. It requires patience, practice, and some level of artistic skill. Knowing the theory as well as how to use color to get what you want will only make you a better colorist.
- *Speed* – The colorist is one of the last in the assembly process. Because of this, if there is problems in earlier stages, the colorist may have less time to complete their work. They are often required to keep the comic on the deadline and will need to develop the speed and endurance to finish work quickly, but maintain quality.
- *Technological Skills* – Nowadays, comic books are having more and more of the process done on computers. Almost all coloring is done on computers using complicated software programs. This is going to require the colorist to be comfortable with computers and software programs. Not to mention that the colorist doesn't actually physically touch the art, but does it all with a scanned piece of artwork. These kinds of skills with technology are becoming more and more necessary.

Letterer

Job Description: The letterer provides the text and sound effects in a comic book. The key here is to add the text in such a manner that makes it easy for the reader to follow the story. There is certainly a lot of artistic creativity that goes into the process, having word balloons and sound effects look like what they sound like, but the letterer also needs to think about how the text will detract from the story and art if it is too bold, overpowering, or hard to read.

Skills Needed:

Love Of Text – Okay, maybe not a love of text, but certainly a liking of how words are used and can convey meaning. Many letterers will try to make the words themselves look like what the person, creature, or effect sounds like. A BOOM will be large and bold while a *whisper* will be soft and airy.

- *Strong Knowledge Of Grammar* – The letterer is one of the last lines of defense for errors. And since a letterer needs to type in the work or do it by hand, not having a strong grasp of spelling, punctuation, and word use will inhibit your chances at success.
- *Think Graphically* – Letterers often take the role of a graphic designer, creating logos, titles, word balloons, sound effects, and more. Just creating the title in Comic Sans because it has the word comic in it is a way to get in serious hot water. You need to think about how those things will impact the page and story. Does it add to the experience? Take away from the art? Lead the reader to the next scene?
- *Technological Skills* – If you plan on doing your lettering in the mainstream style, you will need to do it on a computer. Most comics nowadays are lettered on a computer. There are many programs that letterers use, such as Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop, and Adobe Indesign, to name the most popular.

Superior Penmanship – If you plan on doing your lettering by hand, and some still do, you will need to develop a strong and consistent penmanship style. It needs to be easy to read and flow nicely. You might even consider turning your penmanship into a font in and of itself, which many do today. (<http://comicbooks.about.com>)

Reading Graphic Novels: The Pictures (and Words) I Read

Plot

Summarize the story or part of the story by completing a timeline of the plot. List the main events of the plot, one main event per text box below.

A timeline diagram for a plot. It consists of two rows of four empty square boxes each. The first row of boxes is connected by right-pointing arrows, and the last box in the first row is connected to the first box in the second row by a downward-pointing arrow. The second row of boxes is connected by left-pointing arrows.

Looking at Details

The frame that tells me the most about what this (part of the) story is about

is ... (describe the picture in words)

The details used in this picture are ...

These details tell me ...

Reading Graphic Novels: The Pictures (and Words) I Read

	What the pictures show me		What the words (if any) tell me	
	Directly shown	Indirectly shown (for example, through colour or shading)	Directly stated	Indirectly stated (for example, through size of text)
Character(s)				
Setting (time, place, mood)				
Conflict(s)				

(Adapted from Think Literacy)

Who's Involved in Making the Graphic Novel

Match the job title with the appropriate definition.

_____ Researcher

_____ Writer

_____ Penciler

_____ Inker

_____ Colourist

_____ Letterer

_____ Editor

- A) Adds colour to the penciled drawings.
- B) Traces over the pictures with black ink, adds shading when necessary, and erases any leftover pencil lines.
- C) Reviews all visual and written work for accuracy and consistency.
- D) Gathers background information for the story and checks facts.
- E) The person who drafts and revises the script, they control the narration.
- F) Prints the words in captions and dialogue balloons.
- G) The chief artist and does the roughing in (first draft) and final versions of all pictures.

Examining a Graphic Novel

Name: _____

Elements of a Graphic Novel

Title of Novel: _____

Make notes for the graphic novel you are reading.

Storyline

Main Character

Conflict

Visual Presentation

Consider these elements and record your observations.

Use of Colour and Line

Background Detail and Settings

Characters

Panels (different shapes and sizes)

Examining a Graphic Novel (continued)

Name: _____

Layout

Select a page you feel has an effective layout. Consider the arrangement and sizes of panels, the artist's use of colour, and the portrayal of action in illustrations.

Describe features of this layout that appealed to you.

Page selected: _____

Sketch the design of the layout in geometric shapes (circles, rectangles, etc.)

Dialogue

Sketch 4 different shapes of dialogue balloons or describe dialogue techniques found anywhere in the graphic novel. Suggest a purpose or effect for each shape/technique.

Graphic Story Planning Sheet

Name:

Story Line:

Describe or summarize the action and events to be portrayed through your illustrations and dialogue or narrative balloons.

Location for the story:

Approximate date and/or time of the story:

Sketch the basic layout of panels you plan to create. Include a brief description of the contents of each panel at the side.

Draw a sketch of your main characters and identify them. Use the reverse side of the paper.

Graphic Novel Cover Analysis

Examine the cover of the book and fill in the following table

Strengths What are the first things you notice about the cover? What are the best things about the images on the cover?	Weaknesses What do you dislike the most about the images on the cover?
Opportunities What do I understand about the characters and/or plot of the story by looking at this cover?	Threats Who might this image offend? What problems/challenges do you see with this cover?

20 Questions for Characters

Physical description:

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Sex:
4. Ethnicity:
5. Description of features and mannerisms:

Personal/professional history:

6. Education:
7. Occupation:
8. Description of parents:
9. Description of upbringing/childhood:
10. Main relationships:
11. Type/intensity of religion, if any:

Personality:

12. Basic personality traits (thoughtful, angry, goofy, etc.)
13. Shortcomings/weaknesses:
14. Strengths/special abilities:

What makes this character tick?

15. Driving motivation(s) or goals:

Interrogate your character:

16. Dirty secret:
17. First love:
18. Favorite music and/or art:
19. Incident that created a scar, either physical or mental:
20. Describe a turning point in character's life:



OK, now sum this character up in a sentence or two. Include a sketchy physical description, mention qualities that work for and against him/her, and mention his/her main motivations.

20 questions v.2 10/2002

NACAE

National Association of Comics Art Educators

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Superhero Questionnaire

Published by [B. Mac](#) at 6:28 am under [Creating a Superhero](#), [Designing a Superhero](#), [Writing about Superheroes](#)

This questionnaire will help you design a superhero or supervillain, whether you're writing a novel or comic book.

Background

1. What kind of person was your hero before he got superpowers? (A friendly but awkward nerd?)
2. What sort of job/educational background does he have? (Do these affect his superhero career?)
3. Why should prospective readers care about your hero? What is it about his background that will appeal to them?
4. How old is he?
5. What kind of goals did he have before becoming a superhero? What kinds of problems?
6. What sort of problems does his world have before he became a superhero? Did he notice/care about these problems? (Or did he have a happy and carefree childhood until he saw his parents get murdered?)
7. What does your character think about his world? (Mostly happy? Looking to escape? Looking for something more?)
8. Is there anything in your character's past that he regrets or will regret, like nearly joining a gang or failing to save his uncle?
9. Does your character's background make him a better superhero? For example, Superman's side-job as an investigative journalist frequently gives him leads to look into. Many heroes have scientific or technological skills, etc.

Origin Story

1. Was he born super?
2. Did he choose to be a superhero? Why? (Which personal feelings/experiences influenced that choice? Losing a loved one to criminals? Being a disillusioned cop? Etc.)
3. If he did *not* choose, what caused/forced him to become super? (A physical transformation? Government conscription? Forced servitude?) Is he attempting to become normal? How and why?
4. Was he *chosen* to become a superhero? Who chose him? Why? (Maybe she won Amazonian trials or aced government tests embedded in the OSSLT).
5. Assuming that your character was not born super, what caused him to become super?

Secret Identity

1. Does your character have a secret identity? If so, why? What would the consequences be if his enemies, friends and/or the public found out who he is?
2. How do his powers make it harder (or easier) to keep his secret-identity secret?
3. Has his work as a superhero noticeably changed his body? (For example, Peter Parker gets a lot tougher and picks up unusual bruises and scars). How would your hero conceal these changes from his friends? If a friend noticed anyway, how might he try to explain them away?
4. Has he told anyone who he is? Why? Does anyone else know?
5. Does the government care who he is?
6. What does your character do to keep his identity safe? (Anything besides wearing a mask?)
7. Is anyone close to discovering the truth?
8. Has anyone publicly accused him of being the hero? Has he taken any steps to discredit his accusers or disprove their claims?

Superpowers

1. Here's an obvious question: what superpowers does your superhero have? Less obviously, when your enthusiastic fans try to tell their friends about your story, they will usually start by saying which superpowers your character has. Will they be able to describe your character's powers in one easy sentence?
2. Do his superpowers affect his civilian life in any way?
3. Does your superhero have a special mode of transport? (Not that there's anything wrong with the subway, but you do get weird stares).
4. Readers love being surprised. How will your superhero use his powers to surprise us? Will he be able to resolve his problems in new and fresh ways?



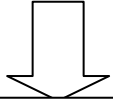
STORY MAP: _____

SETTING:

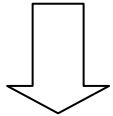
TIME:

PLACE:

MOOD:



CHARACTERS:

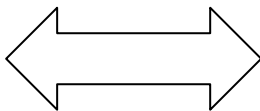
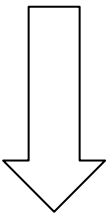


CONFLICT:

KIND:

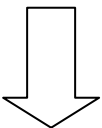
CATEGORY:

EXPLANATION:



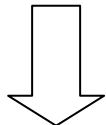
PLOT/EVENTS:

CLIMAX:



RESOLUTION:

THEME:



POINT OF VIEW:

[illegible]

Differentiating Instruction

“Even though God gives us different starting points, it is our obligation to give all people equal opportunity to develop and grow, whatever their starting point. The whole universe is nothing but differentiation, with each part having both its special powers and its areas of total vulnerability” (Rohr, Richard. Adam’s Return).

According to the Ministry of Education, Differentiated Instruction is defined as:

- ☑ Effective instruction that is *responsive* to the learning preferences, interests and readiness of the individual learner
- ☑ An organizing structure or *framework for thinking about teaching and learning*
- ☑ Responding to student needs with an awareness of the decisions that we make and taking *deliberate action to meet the needs of all learners*.

Comics and graphic novels are an excellent way to differentiate instruction. They engage students in a variety of ways, and allow students to understand according to their various learning styles.

Knowledge of Students required to differentiate instruction:

- Readiness
- Interests
- Learning Preferences (e.g., styles, intelligences, environmental)

Aspects of the teaching/learning process that can be differentiated

- Content (learning materials)
- Process (how we help students learn)
- Product (how students demonstrate their learning)
- Learning Environment (conditions for learning)

The links below provide alternate versions of comic books and graphic novels that contain motion and sound.

- http://www.marvel.com/videos/309.Astonishing_X-Men_%231_Animated_Video_Comic
- http://www.marvel.com/digitalcomics/titles/ULTIMATE_SPIDER-MAN.2000

The sites below allow students to create their own superheroes

- http://www.marvel.com/create_your_own_superhero
- <http://www.ugo.com/channels/comics/heroMachine2/heromachine2.asp>

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION CHOICE BOARD

The following chart provides suggested ways your activities can be differentiated to support student success.

LOGICAL-MATHEMATICAL Create a flow chart or matrix	 Be sure to study the criteria carefully before you select and as you proceed.	BODILY-KINESTHETIC Construct a model, representation, or foldable
VISUAL SPATIAL Design a graphic organizer	WILD CARD	INTRAPERSONAL Analyse one of your lessons (you may work alone)
MUSICAL-RHYTHMIC Create a rap, jingle or song	INTERPERSONAL Develop a role play or an oral presentation	VERBAL LINGUISTIC Create a word web of the key concept

APPENDIX A: ARTICLES

Technicolor Spaghetti: Discovering Comic Literature *By Vicki Cox*

Graphic novels, comic books and sequential strips offer unconventional paths to lure students into reading and writing.

Comic books: what kids sneak into the classroom while the teacher isn't looking. Their single-minded desire to turn the page and find out what happened to X-Man or the Hulk can turn into a valuable tool for classroom learning. But for the newcomer, entering the world of comic literature is like falling in a bowl of Technicolor spaghetti. You want to grab something, but you don't know where to start. With so many characters, publishers and comic lingo assaulting the senses, most educators need an introduction to the subject.

Reading with comics

The Graphic Classroom Web site was created by MSTA member Chris Wilson. The Springfield resident is so passionate about comic literature that his master's thesis at Missouri State University centers on it.

"I'm concerned with helping children discover a love for reading," Wilson says. "Comic literature is especially engaging for kids as our world becomes more visually oriented."

Comic literature, according to Wilson, incorporates more than the traditional stapled comic book. It also includes the graphic novel, which tells a single story in 30 to 500 pages, trade books that bind together several comic-book issues, and sequential art, or comic strips.

A burned-out reader himself, Wilson liked the shorter words and sentences in the comic books he discovered while searching for reading material for his daughter.

"Comics restored my enjoyment of reading because the stories were shorter, and I took in details through the art, rather than skimming over the words as I had done with novels," he says. Wilson, 34, established The Graphic Classroom in 2007. He and his Web site's staff — a middle school teacher, high school teacher and school librarian — sort graphic novels for classroom use by age and grade level. Included in each review is the publishing data, list of characters, story synopsis, story and art review, along with the staff evaluation.

His nearly 150 reviews show that comics' subject matter left behind super heroes' escapades with Zap! and Pow! long ago. Education publishers such as Scholastic, Capstone Press, HarperCollins and Learner, as well as traditional comic book companies such as Marvel, DC Comics, TokyoPop and Dark Horse offer graphic fiction and nonfiction in biography, science and literature.

Adaptations of classic literature also come in comic literature form. *Wind in the Willows*, *Great Expectations*, *Tales from the Brothers Grimm* and *The Odyssey* are recent offerings.

Classical Comics has published *Macbeth*, *Dracula*, *Henry V*, *Jane Eyre*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Wuthering Heights* as graphic novels. The stories come in variations: original text (for 15 and older), plain English (for 12 and older) and quick text (stripped of unnecessary words for ages 10 and up or for struggling readers). The story line and the art are identical in each.

Graphic fiction covers the gamut of traditional literature and student interests.

"It has complicated, interesting stories with literary themes. It has all the same qualities as traditional literature except they have a visual component," Wilson says.

Perhaps most lauded is *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, Art Spiegelman's depiction of his father's memories of the Holocaust. Using mice as Jews and cats as the Nazis, the tale won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992.

Graphic novels and comics touch on almost any school subject. In social science, Wilson recommends *The 9-11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*, which condenses into 144 pages the complex findings of the 9/11 Commission.

Writing with sequential art: comic strips

Bill Zimmerman, a former editor and Pulitzer Prize nominee at Newsday, sees creating comic strips of three to four panels as a vehicle for young children to learn language and communication skills.

Zimmerman's Web site, *Make Beliefs Comix*, provides an interactive site for creating simple comic strips with predetermined panels, 15 characters, four emotions, thought and talk balloons, and five background colors for students' use. Minimal computer skills are needed. Since the strips are computer generated, students' work can be printed or e-mailed to others. The site and its links also are rich in story ideas and writing prompts for comic strips.

Writing with comic books

The Comic Book Project provides almost everything except the kids. Beginning with a project-determined subject, students progress through the traditional writing process while writing and drawing a comic book. The Web site describes and shows samples of the projects' end results. The project was created in 2001 by Michael Bitz, Ed.D., to promote literacy through the arts. Beginning as a single after-school program in Queens, N.Y., the project now serves more than 850 schools nationwide.

The topic for 2008-09 is "If I ruled the world..." It focuses students on problems they would like to fix or changes they would like in their community.

Past subjects have included bullying, environmentalism, teamwork, child abuse, vocabulary, grammar and understanding epilepsy.

Activity booklets, manuscript starters, comic-book canvases, lesson plans and student samples are part of the packet, which costs \$6 per student from Dark Horse Comics. Every child's completed comic goes into the Web site's art gallery, and the best are published and distributed for other student use.

Web sites

The Graphic Classroom

graphicclassroom.blogspot.com

Comics in the Classroom

www.comicsintheclassroom.net

Make Beliefs Comix

www.makebeliefscomix.com

The Comic Book Project

www.comicbookproject.org

Comic Books for Young Adults: A Guide for Librarians

ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/lml/comics/pages/index.html



Comics take modern look at spiritual tales

Oct. 9, 2006. 01:00 AM

Whether this column is good news or bad news depends on the perspective from which you are reading it.

If you are a parent hoping to instill some spirituality in your children, it may be good news. If not, well, consider yourself warned.

Spirituality, in the form of Christianity, Buddhism and less well-defined forms of theology or mysticism is slipping into popular culture, particularly cultural forms aimed at children and teens such as comic books, graphic novels, television and movies.

Sometimes it's a blatant retelling of biblical or other religious stories, *The Passion of the Christ* now on DVD is available to all despite its restricted rating. Sometimes it's more allegorical, such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Consider this popular story line: A lone man, yanked from obscurity in a teeming metropolis, struggles to make his city a better place. He seems born to his task and has superhero powers. Some rally around him without question, but others remain doubters.

Superman? Batman? Spider-Man? The X-men? Jesus?

How about, all of the above.

There have always been great stories about those who rise from the shadows to save their communities in their time of greatest need. It's become almost a cliché, especially in Western culture, and as essential to the commercial success of the entertainment industry as the boy-meets-girl-boy-loses-girl-boy-gets-girl story line or the road movie.

But something different is happening now, in the form of direct and deliberate biblical or spiritual references in popular culture — or even straight retellings of religious stories.

The latest entry is a 10-volume series of graphic novels telling the story of Buddha. The latest, Volume 3, came out just last month, with Volume 4 scheduled for a November release. These are paperback editions of the hardcover graphic novels by noted artist Osamu Tezuka, which were originally published in Japanese.

Tezuka is considered by many to be the father of modern manga, a distinctive Japanese style of comic art noted for its simple yet artistic pictures, characters with big eyes and mouths, strong story lines and satire. All things that appeal to kids.

The Buddha books tell the story of one of the world's most important religious figures in a way children and teens can relate to.

My own kids, who are not Buddhist, bug me to get the next edition as soon as it comes out. I have accommodated, largely because I think it's got to be a good thing for my children to understand something about the religions found in our increasingly diverse society.

Graphic novels have been used to tell both Old and New Testament Bible stories as well.

Megillat Esther was published by the Jewish Publication Society of America a year ago, telling the story of a woman who saves her Jewish brethren from extinction at the hands of a tyrant. The story is a straight retelling of the Old Testament story, with traditional Hebrew text alongside English translations.

Marked, by American artist Steve Ross, is a modern retelling of the Jesus story from the Gospel of Mark. Published last year, the book is set in a modern Gotham-styled metropolis occupied by a foreign force. Jesus works as a construction worker instead of as a carpenter.

At work one day, he hears John the Baptist over the radio extolling revolution. He puts down his circular saw, runs to the river to be baptized by John, goes home to shave his head and beard and begins his mission.

This Jesus is more of an everyman who cringes at being thought of as "good" and still enjoys his soft drinks. His temptation by the devil comes in the form of a man in a limo promising him a great career.

"Have your people call my people," the devil calls out.

Ross has credited groundbreaking comic artist Robert Crumb and director Quentin Tarantino as major influences, which has helped give his novel the sensibility it needed to appeal to a younger audience.

He also liked the work of Stan Lee — the man behind Spider-Man, the Hulk and the X-Men among others — because his characters inevitably had great back stories that made them more well-rounded.

They were also pretty obvious allegorical Jesus stories. Take Spider-Man — a young man of humble origins discovers he has great powers, which he uses to make his city a better place. At one point, he is even tempted to join the side of evil, but rejects it. But perhaps the most obvious retelling of the Jesus story comes in the form of Superman. It's a theme author Stephen Skelton explores in his recently released *The Gospel According to the World's Greatest Superhero*.

The parallels between Jesus and Superman are abundant, as Skelton points out.

A father sends his only son to Earth to save mankind. The boy's parents on Earth are named Martha and Jonathon, very close to Mary and Joseph (which Skelton says were originally to be their names). The boy and his real father share the last name El, the Hebrew word for God. His arch enemy is Lex Luthor, which sounds an awful lot like Lucifer.

In the end, though, Skelton decides that Superman is not a retelling of the Jesus story the way that, say, *Marked* is. He finds it no less a powerful instrument for conveying a spiritual story.

"Superman is not Jesus Christ. He is a Christ figure, a figure resembling Christ — as we all should be."

Stuart Laidlaw is the Star's faith and ethics reporter.

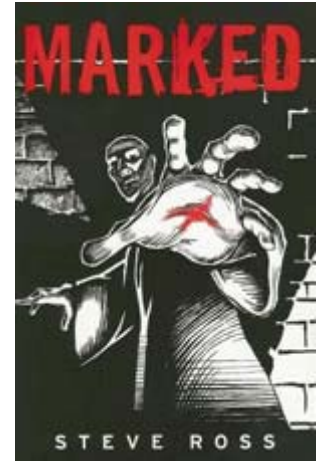


Graphic Gospel: Steve Ross's New Take on the Gospel in *Marked*

By Karen A. Keely

What if Jesus heard about John the Baptist's ministry while listening to the radio as he worked with a power saw in his carpentry shop? What if the Virgin Mary wore a floral housedress? What if the media hounded Jesus, shysters hawked his healing powers, and a former leper rapped over the airwaves about his healing experience? What if the twelve disciples included a punk with a mohawk, a black prostitute, two dimwit brothers, a woman with a cane, and other assorted misfits?

The only explanation is that you must be reading Steve Ross's *Marked*, a graphic novel reinterpretation of the Gospel According to Mark (Seabury Press, 2005). *Marked* follows the conventions of the comic book genre -- with mostly rectangular panels including pictures and dialogues "bubbles" - and takes advantage of the form's ability to include both realism and fantasy. The human characters, for example, are for the most part drawn naturalistically, while the demons are serpent-like monsters that grow and stretch hideously, sometimes across several panels.



What if the media hounded Jesus, shysters hawked his healing powers, and a former leper rapped over the airwaves about his healing experience?

Ross thus takes in a biblical direction the recent popular and critical interest in graphic novels and memoirs (which arguably began in 1992 when the Pulitzer Prize committee created a special award for Art Spiegelman's Holocaust memoir *Maus*). As such, this compelling book provides a unique opportunity for newly invigorated discussions of the gospels, discussions that might be of far more interest to young or unchurched people than the ordinary Sunday school fare. Long-time churchgoers should also find the book a back-to-basics reintroduction to Jesus' ministry and commitment to social justice and to the poor. Not only does Ross re-narrate the earliest written and shortest gospel, he translates the context into one that resonates with modern readers.

This gospel takes place in an occupied territory, a police state that abuses inhabitants, where the poor and the well-to-do alike are isolated and alienated from one another and from the earth.

The opening image of the book, for example, is stylized but still should look eerily familiar to anyone who watches the evening news. A tent city squats against the backdrop of high-rise urban development, while in the foreground, a fence of razor wire is strung over wooden crosses; a large posted sign behind the razor wire reads, "Annual Thank Your Liberators Day. Have your ID ready for inspection." Inhabitants of the tents, as we immediately find out, have learned to "keep our eyes down and our mouths shut" about soldiers' brutality in hopes that such willful blindness will protect their families from future abuses.

This gospel takes place in an occupied territory, a police state that abuses inhabitants, where the poor and the well-to-do alike are isolated and alienated from one another and from the earth.

In another example, Jesus's abuse by the Roman soldiers is framed here as police abuse of prisoners. Especially noteworthy is the page entirely taken up with police report that includes Jesus' fingerprints, a photograph of his beaten face, and an X-ray of his crushed hand, the fingers clearly broken. Those Christians who are inclined to romanticize the cross are here reminded that this

torture is the work of the state against its people, that, horrifyingly, there is nothing out of the ordinary in this abuse and the brutal killing that follows it.

In this and other ways, Ross succeeds in shaking up his readers' expectations. For instance, the Gospel According to Mark finishes (before the two different endings that were appended in later Greek manuscripts) on a grim note: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16: 8). This abrupt and unsatisfying ending is for many Christians elided with the resurrection narratives in the other three gospels, but Ross refuses his readers that satisfaction; in his graphic version, the angel waiting in the tomb is a huge and disturbing clown -- for many people, one of the scariest images there is -- and the only resurrection in the narrative is the mystery of a sunflower growing through bones.



Moreover, this graphic novel is insistently multicultural, multiracial, and urban. As Ross commented in a 2005 [interview](#), "It's interesting that New York City itself has become as much a factor in my growth as a Christian as my church. The city is a breathtaking mess of extremes: excitement, loneliness, grotesque wealth, inexcusable poverty, rampant injustice, and unexpected twists of grace and beauty." Interestingly, in this "salad bowl" of urban ethnic diversity, none of the characters is identifiably Jewish. On the one hand, this artistic decision helps the text completely steer clear of the anti-Semitism that sometimes accompanies interpretations of the gospels; on the other hand, it also removes Jesus' primary religious and historical context. I don't say that Ross made a bad decision here, but certainly this is an aspect of the novel that readers will want to discuss.

Another decision Ross makes [...] is his depiction of Judas. I certainly appreciate Ross's characterization of Judas as a loyal disciple trying to save his master's life by stopping his clearly suicidal project ("He's lost sight of his mission. He's going to get himself killed! He doesn't know it, but he needs me, now more than ever he needs me to stop him"). Clearly there is much to talk about here, and I think that *Marked* is crying out for group discussions in parishes.

Ross is currently at work on a graphic novel about Paul. Clearly Ross is a writer and artist to look out for; I anticipate more interesting texts from him in the future and look forward to reading and discussing them in community. I would recommend that Seabury Press produce study guides for *Marked* and for Ross's future work to facilitate these community discussions.

Karen A. Keely is an English professor who has recently moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. She may be reached at karen.keely@gmail.com.

For Graphic Novels, a New Frontier: Teenage Girls

by GEORGE GENE GUSTINES

The New York Times

Published: November 25, 2006

“It’s time we got teenage girls reading comics,” said Karen Berger, a senior vice president at DC Comics. And DC, the comics powerhouse best known as home to Superman and Batman, has a program to make that happen.

In May, DC plans to introduce Minx, a line of graphic novels aimed at young adult female readers, starting with six titles in 2007, each retailing for less than \$10. The stories will be far removed from the superheroes who more typically appeal to young males. They include “Clubbing,” about a London party girl who solves a mystery; “Re-Gifters,” about a Korean-American teenager in California who enjoys martial arts; and “Good as Lily,” about a young woman who meets three versions of herself at different ages.

Teenage girls, Ms. Berger said, are smart and sophisticated and “about more than going out with the cute guy. This line of books gives them something to read that honors that intelligence and assertiveness and that individuality.”

As a whole, the line is positioned as an alternative for teenage girls who have, especially in bookstores, become increasingly smitten with the Japanese comics known as manga. In 2004, DC started CMX, a manga imprint, to capture part of that audience. The marketing then was similar to that used for DC’s other titles.

With Minx, though, DC has taken what, for it, is the unusual step of seeking outside help. It has joined with Alloy Marketing + Media to promote Minx. All told, DC, a unit of Time Warner, will spend \$250,000 next year to push the line.

“In terms of consumer marketing, it’s got to be the largest thing we’ve done in at least three decades,” said Paul Levitz, the president and publisher of DC Comics. “It’s not large by the scale of consumer marketing and advertising as it’s done in America, but it’s a large-scale commitment, I think, for a publishing company in general.”

Alloy Entertainment, a division of the marketing company, has helped to make hits of books like “Gossip Girls” and “The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants.” Alloy was also the so-called book packager behind “How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild and Got a Life,” a first novel by a 19-year-old [Harvard](#) sophomore named [Kaavya Viswanathan](#) that was pulled from stores earlier this year when it was learned that numerous passages had been copied from novels by other writers.

Still, Alloy is offering DC access to a large audience of teenage girls, through Web sites and the Delia’s shopping catalog, which has a mailing list of nearly five million, according to Samantha

Skey, Alloy's senior vice president for strategic marketing. Ms. Skey said Minx would be the first graphic novel publisher to be included in the catalog.

Along with other initiatives, Alloy plans to create online networks about the novels that will let subscribers write reviews, see previews and sketches or discuss the stories.

DC cast a wide net in seeking those stories. "To us it doesn't matter if the person has written comics before or is known to the comic book market," Ms. Berger said. "We want writers who can really write to the demographic and to really bring something new to the table."

The right creative team is important. "When you had mostly boys and men making comics, you had comics made mainly for boys and men," said Johanna Draper Carlson, the editor of comicsworthreading.com, a Web site for comic book news and reviews. "Then you end up with teen-girl superheroes who are drawn like Victoria's Secret models."

"I don't think only women can write for women," Ms. Carlson added, "but I think it helps provide an alternative perspective and a more true-to-life experience." Ms. Carlson, who often champions female-friendly comics on her site, is taking a wait-and-see attitude to the Minx line.

The first Minx graphic novel will be "The P.L.A.I.N. Janes," written by Cecil Castellucci and illustrated by Jim Rugg. It tells the story of Jane, a transfer student in a suburban high school who starts a campaign, "People Loving Art in Neighborhoods." It's a call to appreciate the everyday world that comes to involve everything from protesting the construction of a new mall to encouraging pet adoptions from animal shelters.

Jane's classmates and fellow believers are Jane, who is interested in theater; Jayne, an academic whiz; and Polly Jane, a jock. Each is decidedly not part of the in-crowd. The reason for Jane's transfer is serious: her family fled to suburbia after Jane survived a terrorist attack that blew up a cafe in fictional Metro City.

The experience of survival is a personal one for Ms. Castellucci, 37, whose young-adult novels include "Boy Proof" and "The Queen of Cool." In 1979, when she was 9, Ms. Castellucci witnessed a bombing by the [Irish Republican Army](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Republican_Army) in Brussels. In 1986, she was in Paris during a rash of bombings. Those incidents, and the events of Sept. 11, played a role in shaping the story.

"It seemed like this was a good opportunity to explore those fearful feelings that I had growing up," she said in a telephone interview from her home in Los Angeles. "They've always been a part of my makeup and fears." Feeling scared, she said: is an emotion everyone understands. "You can't help it if you're a part of this world."

Ms. Castellucci was recruited by Shelly Bond, a Minx editor. It was an easy sell. "I love comic books," Ms. Castellucci said, listing several series she enjoys, including "Fables" and "American Virgin," on the DC imprint Vertigo, and a particular creator ("Brian K. Vaughan. I love everything he does").

But reading comics is different from creating one, particularly a 146-page graphic novel. “I had to learn how to write a story all over again,” she said. “I did have a week or two when I thought I don’t know what I’m doing.” She said that the graphic novel was “kind of like a movie or a storyboard, but it’s not. There’s so much you can do with the images and the pacing.” She credited Mr. Rugg, the artist of “The P.L.A.I.N. Janes,” as a prime source for advice.

Mr. Rugg, who is based outside Pittsburgh, said he appreciated the goal of Minx. “I liked their target demographic,” he said. “I like the idea of doing comics for an atypical reader.” In addition to creating the drawings, Mr. Rugg also gray-scaled them, giving the black-and-white comic book a sense of color. He finished his work last month.

One of Mr. Rugg’s previous comics was “Street Angel,” about a homeless teenage girl who fights crime, which he created with the writer Brian Maruca. Mr. Rugg, 29, called that comic, published by Slave Labor Graphics, his response to the typical depiction of women in mainstream comics, most particularly their impossibly proportioned bodies.

“It’s the same for men,” he acknowledged. “But I don’t find that as offensive.”

Sparking Media Literacy with Comics

by Peter Gutierrez (www.diamondbookshelf.com)

I'm afraid I have some bad news for movies and television. Oh, and for videogames and the Web, too.

That's because experience is slowly leading me to believe that leveraging graphic novels, comics, and manga may be the best way to drive K-12 media literacy instruction—especially within the ELA curriculum.

All right, so I'm overstating the case. But that's probably in response to the tendency I've noticed in media literacy circles to relegate sequential art to an afterthought when compared to its cousins with all the moving parts. In contrast, I'm going to make the argument for revisiting comics as an inherently effective teaching gateway to a variety of media as well as a means to address broader issues of process and the role of media in society.

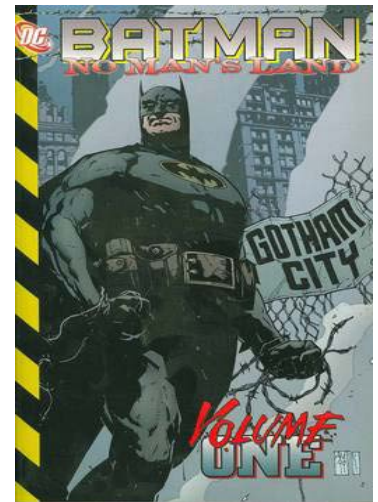
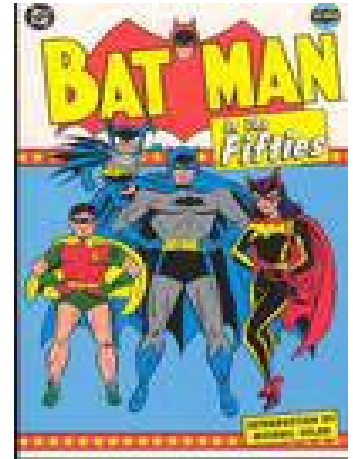
One of the great things about using comics in media literacy is that they can be adapted to virtually any grade level as long as one shifts the content for age appropriateness and interest level: the clarity with which this medium can illustrate the core concepts of media literacy remains.

So what are these concepts? In a nutshell, they relate to how media messages are made, by whom, and for what audiences and purposes. By exploring comics as a font of pop culture from which hit movies, animated TV shows, videogames, and licensed products all spring, students come to understand the profound similarities and differences that exist across media. Moreover, they can easily reflect on their own roles as readers, consumers, fans, and even fledging creators. In the end, students come to see how they contribute to the flow of market forces and in turn actually shape the evolution of art forms. They never knew they were so powerful.

I make these claims primarily because of three properties of comics, which

- 1) represent a unique opportunity to teach both visual and print media.
- 2) allow educators to extend learning to other media “centrifugally.”
- 3) provide a powerful way for students to activate prior knowledge.

Kathleen Monnin, Assistant Professor of Literacy at the University of North Florida, likes to point to the central role of comics by invoking today's all-important goal of “image literacy.” “We find ourselves living during the greatest communication revolution in history, where image-dominant literacies of screen, animation, technology, video game, and picture are starting to share the stage with the traditional print-text literacies.” Comics, then, represent a key entry point for K-12 into this “multi-modal literacy world.” And while “visual literacy” (and sometimes “critical literacy”) has long been an element in basal reading and lit programs, rarely are the resources provided as rich and engaging as those in the graphic formats.



Before even providing historical context, you can have students practice visual literacy by comparing and contrasting images of Batman. What feelings does each evoke? How is the character portrayed differently in purely visual terms? Which invites comparisons to other media, and why?

In short, want to show kids how billboards catch your attention in a matter of seconds as you drive along the highway? Study comics. Want to teach the way that the layout of a print ad or a Web page maximizes the impact of the available space through strategic combinations of print and graphics? Ditto. You can teach formal elements such as composition, rhythm, color, typeface, page navigation, and many more, all by using comics as your springboard.



But it's not just a matter of teaching message-making techniques in stasis. Comics present a terrific way to study the social evolution of media itself. The focus of study can be an iconic character such as Wonder Woman, who is particularly fascinating (kids love to learn about how she "lost her powers" in the late '60s), or a particular creator. For the latter, you might want to consider someone like Will Eisner, whose work appeared in strip form and was later reprinted in comics and comic "magazines," and who of course helped pioneer the graphic novel, too. At higher grade levels you may want to discuss Neil Gaiman and Charles Vess winning the World Fantasy Award in 1991, and the subsequent altering of the rules to prevent comics from being considered "short fiction" in the future. What cultural forces are at work there—and, moreover, are they in some way necessary, so that we can keep our "category definitions" discrete in order to aid us somehow as consumers?

Is a statue or toy a "medium"? Why or why not? Also, when deprived of explicit instruction in the concept of licensing, students can end up with the impression that print and media publishers such as Marvel manufacture everything from lunchboxes to apparel in their hallowed halls.

Even the term "graphic novel" invites discussion. How are graphic novels like and unlike prose novels? And besides the obvious formal considerations, what are some other reasons—ones of connotation, not denotation—for why creators and publisher might prefer this term? Through such inquiry, students can come to learn how critical and commercial discourse about media helps shape the direction of media itself.



One of the ways that I narrow and personalize such issues is through the concept of target audience. In this respect, manga, with its explicit classifications of *shojo*, *shonen*, and so on, makes for a wonderful teaching tool. If students are unaware of these terms, consider presenting an array of titles and have them select those that appeal to them... then track whether the publishers have "hit their targets." When I do this with students we examine not only the narrative content, but also the storytelling and graphic styles. Do these break down along age and gender lines? Then we extend learning by identifying where this happens in other media as well.



I also point out that often the same artists who create manga and comics produce visuals for advertising purposes, too. I have students analyze comic shop posters of the type distributed at conventions and discuss what they share with movie posters (e.g., creators' names displayed as prominently as those of movie stars, release dates cited, etc.). By the way, that's another nice thing about teaching media literacy with comics—promotional items are high-interest and easy to come by.

Though neither of these terrific works was produced with a K-12 audience in mind, media literacy educators should have little problem adapting their insights to the needs and abilities of their students.

Yet perhaps the strongest way to encourage analysis is to focus on adaptations of characters and specific titles over time and across media. For example, in what ways does a 1940s serial have more in common with monthly comics (or multi-volume manga) and TV series than with movies—even though such serials were shown in theaters? Answer: the cliffhanger is a narrative

device that ensures future attendance/receipts—just as it has done so for decades in comics and television (i.e., “Who Shot J.R.?”, which began the convention of season-ending cliffs, is really just a variation on “Same Bat-Time, Same Bat-Channel”).

Of course what’s most fun for students—and where they can leverage their prior knowledge in exciting ways—is when we explore a popular character such as Spider-Man. We do analyses of the Lee-Ditko comics alongside the 1960s TV show and then compare that entire relationship to the current one between *Ultimate Spider-Man* and the impressive new WB series *The Spectacular Spider-Man*. To what extent have the television producers drawn on the comics, and for what reasons? More importantly, how do the constraints and strengths of any given medium inform this dynamic? At the higher grade levels, works such as *Ghost World* or *American Splendor* may offer more compelling themes, but the principles at work are unaffected.

In pedagogical terms, what’s really at work here is the idea behind most forms of effective education: explain the unknown in terms of the known. Some students will be more familiar with broadcast cartoons than comics, and others the opposite. The point is that each of these groups brings a body of knowledge to the conversation that enriches learning for all.

Another powerful way for students to activate prior knowledge concerns media production, a necessary but sometimes overlooked component of media literacy. No one has to teach young people to love creating their own comics—they seem to gravitate towards it naturally. And if it’s not mini-books or items that are instantly recognizable as comics, kids will work comics-like elements into everything from science dioramas to homemade birthday cards. Major publishers such as Marvel and DC have a history of producing engaging “how-to” books and to these I’d like to suggest adding the more far-ranging *Drawing Words and Writing Pictures* by Jessica Abel and Matt Madden. The title itself not only sums up the artistic mindset necessary to creating comics, but also perfectly puts a name to concepts that are at the heart of visual literacy itself.

Finally, the rewards of media literacy are not totally divorced from those of print literacy and therefore the intangible benefits that stem from appreciating art and literature in a more general sense. All that media literacy does is peel back the surface to expose the churning gears that project the finished products onto our imaginations. This process of demystification, which is largely based upon making text-to-world and text-to-text connections, is no way intended to supplant the primacy of text-to-self, but rather to provide an alternate lens through which we can view that relationship. Does mass media create modern mythologies by connecting all of us with common stories that evolve through continual retellings? Or does the process of creating something for mass consumption dilute the capacity of any given “message” to inspire us personally?

These are not the kind of questions whose value lies in their ability to be answered. The point is not to demonstrate to students how they can avoid being consumers, as if there were something to be shunned about that role, but rather how to be educated ones. As an example of what this might look like, educators who use comics in the classroom probably only need to point to themselves. In the end, what you’re teaching kids is that they can keep their brains open as well as their hearts.



Part of being media literate is identifying the audience segments that can't see themselves in media messages. In this case, what a difference a decade makes: in the cover art that helped introduce the "New" X-Men, the original team feels practically monochromatic when compared to the new members, who comprise "people of color" both literally and figuratively.

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